IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

DATED: 05.12.2007

CORAM:

THE HONOURABLE MR.JUSTICE P.D.DINAKARAN
AND
THE HONOURABLE MR.JUSTICE R.REGUPATHI

Habeas Corpus Petition No.1341 of 2007

M.Vijaya .. Petitioner

Vs

1. The Secretary to the Govt.
of Tamil Nadu,
Prohibition and Excise Dept.,
Fort St. George, Chennai.

2. The District Magistrate &
District Collector, Nagapattinam
District, Nagapattinam. .. Respondents

Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India for issue of Writ of Habeas Corpus as stated therein.

For Petitioner : Mr.T.P.Senthilkumar

For Respondents: Mr.P.Kumaresan
Additional Public Prosecutor

ORDER

(Order of the Court was made by P.D.DINAKARAN,J.)

The petitioner, wife of the detenue by name Mathi @ Mathiyazhagan, who was detained at Central Prison, Tiruchirppalli, by an order dated 24.7.2007 of the second respondent under the provisions of the Tamil Nadu Prevention of Dangerous Activities of Bootleggers, Drug Offenders, Forest Offenders, Goondas, Immoral Traffic Offenders, Sand Offenders, Slum Grabbers and Video Pirates Act, 1982 (Tamil Nadu Act 14 of 1982) branding him as a Bootlegger, seeks a writ of Habeas Corpus to call for the records in connection with the order of detention passed in C.O.C.No.33 of 2007, to set aside the same and to direct the respondents to produce him before this Court and set him at liberty.

2. The ground case, which led to the passing of the detention order is that on 7.7.2007, while conducting prohibition raid at Nagakudaiyan village, the Sub-Inspector of Police attached to Prohibition Enforcement Wing, Nagapattinam, found the detenu selling illicit arrack. On seeing the police party, persons who had come there to consume the illicit arrack took to their heels, but the detenu was apprehended by the police. On his confession, a case in Cr.No.1470/2007 was registered for offences under Sections 4(1)(aa) r/w 4(1-A) of the Tamil Nadu Prohibition Act. The

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sample of illicit arrack seized was sent for Chemical Analysis and it was found admixed with 3.1 mg w/v per 100 ml of atropine.

3.The second respondent, taking note of the above ground case and finding that the detenu came to the adverse notice of the authorities in five cases of alike nature, two on the file of the Prohibition Enforcement Wing, Nagapattinam in Crime Nos.1430/2006 and 1464/2007, and three on the file of Kariyappattinam Police station in Crime Nos.125/2006, 115/2007 and 130/2007, having satisfied that there is compelling necessity to detain the detenu in order to prevent him from indulging in such activities, which are prejudicial to the maintenance of public order and public health, ordered his detention dubbing him as a Bootlegger.

4. The learned counsel for the petitioner challenges the impugned order of detention only on the ground of delay in considering the representation on two occasions, one the part of the sponsoring authority in sending the parawar remarks to the detaining authority and the other by the Government in preparing the rejection letter. Hence, we do not propose to go into other aspects of the case.

5.1. Before delving into the issue relating to the delay as contended above, it would be apt to refer the law on the point.

5.2.Article 22(5) of the Constitution of India suggests that the obligation of the government is to offer the detenu an opportunity of making a representation against the order, before it is confirmed according to the procedure laid down under the relevant provisions of law, vide K.M. Abdulla Kunhi v. Union of India, (1991) 1 SCC 476 .

5.3.The right to representation under Article 22(5) of the Constitution of India includes right to expeditious disposal by the State Government. Expedition is the rule and delay defeats mandate of Article 22 (5) of the Constitution of India, vide Ram Sukrya Mhatre v. R.D. Tyagi, 1992 Supp (3) SCC 65.

5.4.Any inordinate and unexplained delay on the part of the Government in considering the representation renders the detention illegal, vide Tara Chand v. State of Rajasthan, (1980) 2 SCC 321 and Raghavendra Singh v. Supdt., Distt. Jail, (1986) 1 SCC 650.

5.5.It is a constitutional obligation of the Government to consider the representation forwarded by the detenu without any delay. Though no period is prescribed by Article 22 of the Constitution for the decision to be taken on the representation, the words “as soon as may be” in clause (5) of Article 22 convey the message that the representation should be considered and disposed of at the earliest. But that does not mean that the authority is pre-empted from explaining any delay which would have occasioned in the disposal of the representation. The court can certainly consider whether the delay was occasioned due to permissible reasons or unavoidable causes. If delay was caused on account of any indifference or

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lapse in considering the representation, such delay will adversely affect further detention of the prisoner. In other words, it is for the authority concerned to explain the delay, if any, in disposing of the representation. It is not enough to say that the delay was very short. Even longer delay can as well be explained. So the test is not the duration or range of delay, but how it is explained by the authority concerned. Even the reason that the Minister was on tour and hence there was a delay of five days in disposing of the representation was rejected by the Apex Court holding that when the liberty of a citizen guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India is involved, the absence of the Minister at head quarters is not sufficient to justify the delay, since the file could be reached the Minister with utmost promptitude in cases involving the vitally important fundamental right of a citizen, vide Rajammal v. State of T.N., (1999) 1 SCC 417.

6.Coming to the case on hand, admittedly, objecting to the order of detention, a representation dated 23.7.2007 was made on behalf of the detenu, which was received by the Government on 7.9.2007. Remarks were called for from the detaining authority on 8.9.2007 and on receipt of the same, the detaining authority called for parawar remarks from the sponsoring authority on 13.9.2007. But, the sponsoring authority sent the remarks only on 19.9.2007, after a delay of six days, which is not properly explained. Even if we exclude the intervening holidays, viz. 15.9.2007 and 16.9.2007 (being Saturday and Sunday), there is delay of four days in sending the parawar remarks, which is inexcusable. Thereafter, the file was submitted on 26.9.2007 and on 27.9.2007, the Under Secretary, the Additional Secretary and the Minister concerned dealt with the file and the Minister rejected the representation. Even thereafter, the rejection letter was prepared only on 5.10.2007, i.e. after 8 days, which also remained unexplained. The rejection letter was served on the detenu on 10.10.2007.

7.At this juncture, a reference to the decision of the Apex Court in Kundanbhai Dulabhai Sheikh v District Magistrate, Ahmedabad, (1996) 3 SCC 194 is apposite:

> "In spite of law laid down above by this Court repeatedly over the past three decades, the Executive, namely, the State Government and its officers continue to behave in their old, lethargic fashion and like all other files rusting in the Secretariat for various reasons including red-tapism, the representation made by a person deprived of his liberty, continue to be dealt with in the same fashion. The Government and its officers will not give up their habit of maintaining a consistent attitude of lethargy. So also, this Court will not hesitate in quashing the order of detention to restore the 'liberty and freedom' to the person whose detention is allowed to become bad by the Government itself on account of his representation not being disposed of at the earliest."

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8.That apart, it is a settled law that there should not be supine indifference, slackness or callous attitude in considering the representation. Any unexplained delay in the disposal of representation would be a breach of the constitutional imperative and it would render the continued detention impermissible and illegal, vide K.M. Abdulla Kunhi v. Union of India, (1991) 1 SCC 476.

9.In the instant case, admittedly there is delay on the the part of the sponsoring authority in sending the parawar remarks as well as on the part of the Government in preparing the rejection letter, as referred to earlier, and the same, in our considered opinion, vitiates the impugned order of detention. We are, therefore, inclined to allow this petition.

In the result, the order of detention is set aside. The detenu is directed to be set at liberty forthwith unless his presence is required in connection with any other case.

sra

Sd/-
Asst.Registrar

/true copy/

Sub Asst.Registrar

To:

1. The Secretary to Government
   of Tamil Nadu, Prohibition and
   Excise Department, Fort St. George,
   Chennai 600 009.

2. The District Magistrate &
   District Collector,
   Nagapattinam District.

3. The Superintendent
   Central Prison, Tiruchirppalli.

4. The Public Prosecutor,
   High Court, Madras.

5. The Joint Secretary to Government of Tamil Nadu,
   Public (Law & Order) Department,
   Fort Saint George, Chennai-9.

+1 cc to Mr.T.P.Senthilkumar, Advocate Sr.No.71871.

NG(CO)
dcp/13.12

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